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硕士学位论文

**On the Comprehensive Improvement of Oral English
---From the Perspective of Second Language Acquisition**

从二语习得角度论英语口语的全面提高

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Synopsis

This thesis investigates how to improve students' oral English in an effective and comprehensive way from a perspective of theories in second language acquisition and cognitive psychology, which focuses on the three main aspects of oral English---fluency, accuracy and complexity.

In the paper we will observe the current situation of students' oral English learning in China and find out the exact internal and external factors that hinder the development of learners' oral English. The theories in second language acquisition and cognitive psychology will help us to find out an effective and comprehensive way to improve students' oral English.

It is originated in the survey that in current schools and colleges some teachers over-emphasize the fluency of students' oral English and only focus on communicative purpose. They ignore the accuracy and complexity of students' oral English. Meanwhile, the majority of students adopt various communicative strategies (i. e. avoidance) to ensure success of communication. However the frequent use of communicative strategies and the teachers' tolerant attitude towards errors lead to the fossilization of students' language competence during oral English learning.

Conversely, some teachers who see error corrections and preparing students to take tests as their major instructional responsibilities over-correct students' mistakes and errors. They emphasize the accuracy of students' oral English too much. Consequently when students speak English, they are anxious of making errors and their confidence will be reduced, which is disadvantageous for students to improve oral English. The thesis is based on task-based approach instruction, trying to investigate a comprehensive way to improve students' oral English, and it mainly attempts to answer the questions as follows:

1. In the process of information process model, can memory-based system (lexical chunks) really help students to improve the fluency of their oral English?
2. In face of errors that students make during speaking English, to what degree can teachers correct them? What is the appropriate role of teachers?

3. Can task-based approach (TBA) provide a comprehensive way to improve the fluency, accuracy and complexity of oral English to the largest degree?

In the process of information process model, memory-based system (lexical chunks) can help students to improve the fluency of their oral English. When output is produced, their attentional resource between meanings and forms is competed. Memory-based system can help them to ensure oral fluency to a great degree. Moreover, forms are important in oral English as well, so it is necessary for teachers to guide their attentional resource to ensure comprehensive improvement of oral English.

Whether from the objective perspective of theories in second language acquisition and cognitive psychology or from the subjective perspective of college students in the questionnaires, task-based approach can maximize the probability that all three above goals can be achieved. During task-based class, the expectation that all three goals can be achieved not only needs advanced theories in second language acquisition, but teachers' and students' joint efforts as well.

Pre-task, during-task and post-task phases in task-based approach can activate both teachers and students to balance language meanings and forms so as to meet *College English Courses' Teaching Requirements* issued by Ministry of Education of China and enable college students to improve oral fluency, oral accuracy and oral complexity in an effective way.

Key Words: Oral English Improvement; Second Language Acquisition; Task-based Approach.

摘 要

本文试图从二语习得和认知心理学理论的角度研究如何全面有效地提高学生的英语口语,并且聚焦英语口语的三大方面——流利性,准确性和复杂性。

在本文,我们将总结目前中国大学生英语口语学习的现状,并找出阻碍学生口语能力提高的内部因素和外部因素。二语习得和认知心理学理论将有助于我们发现全面有效提高英语口语的方法。

据观察,在目前的学校,一些老师过度地强调学生口语的流利性,仅仅关注语言交流的目的。他们忽略了学生英语口语的准确性和复杂性。同时,大多数学生在口语交流中为了确保交际的成功,经常采取不同的交际策略。然而,频繁地使用交际策略以及这些老师对待错误的宽容导致了学生的语言能力在英语口语学习过程中出现石化现象。

相反地,将纠正错误和帮助学生通过考试作为主要职责的老师强调口语的准确性却过分地纠正学生的错误。学生在说英语时,由于担心犯错而产生焦虑情绪,从而导致自信心减弱,这些对学生的口语发展十分不利。

本文基于任务型教学法,尝试发现一种可以全面提高学生口语能力的方法,并试图回答以下的问题:

1. 在信息处理模式中,记忆系统能否真正地帮助学生提高口语流利性?
2. 学生在英语口语过程中产生的错误,老师应该在何种程度上纠正它们?在口语过程中,老师应该发挥什么样合适的作用?
3. 任务型教学能否在最大程度上提供一种全面的方法来提高学生的口语流利性,准确性和复杂性?

在信息处理模式中,记忆系统的确能真正地帮助学生提高口语的流利性。当学生产生输出时,他们的注意力资源对意义和形式的争夺十分激烈。记忆系统能在很大程度上帮助学生确保口语的流利性。另外,语言形式在英语口语中也十分重要,因此,老师在适当的时候监察学生的输出,以确保学生口语的全面提高是必要的。

无论从二语习得理论的客观角度还是从本文问卷调查的主观角度上分析,任

务型教学能最大可能地实现以上三个目标。在基于任务型教学的课堂上，期盼三个目标得以实现不仅需要二语习得相关理论的指导，老师和学生共同的努力也十分重要。

任务型教学的任务前，任务中，任务后的三个阶段能够使师生积极参与交际互动，他们的共同努力在最大程度上平衡语言的意义和形式，从而达到国家教育部对大学英语口语的教学要求，并且能全面有效地提高学生的口语能力。

关键词： 英语口语提高；二语习得；任务型教学

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 The Situation of Oral English Learning in China.....	3
2.1 Importance of oral English and its characteristics.....	3
2.1.1 Objective and nature of oral English teaching in colleges.....	3
2.1.2 Main aspects of oral English.....	4
2.2 The current situation of college students' oral English competence in China.....	5
2.2.1 The current situation.....	5
2.2.2 The factors which hinder oral English improvement.....	10
2.2.2.1 Internal factors.....	10
2.2.2.2 External factors.....	11
Chapter 3 Review of Second Language Acquisition Theories.....	13
3.1 Krashen's five hypotheses.....	13
3.1.1 The Acquisition- Learning Hypothesis.....	14
3.1.2 The Natural Order Hypothesis.....	15
3.1.3 The Monitor Hypothesis.....	16
3.1.4 The Input Hypothesis.....	16
3.1.5 The Affective Filter Hypothesis.....	19
3.2 Fossilization in oral English.....	22
3.2.1 Possible causes of fossilization.....	22
3.2.2 Teaching strategies.....	24
Chapter 4 Main Aspects of Oral English.....	26
4.1 Fluency.....	26
4.1.1 Anxiety.....	26
4.1.2 Memory-based system.....	28
4.1.3 The role of practice.....	29
4.2 Accuracy.....	30

4.2.1 Error evaluation.....	31
4.2.2 Error treatment.....	32
4.3 Complexity.....	33
4.3.1 Language transfer.....	33
4.3.2 Communication strategies.....	34
 Chapter 5 Task-based Approach Instruction.....	 36
5.1 Theoretical background.....	37
5.1.1 Definition, nature and classification of tasks.....	38
5.1.1.1 Definition of tasks.....	38
5.1.1.2 Classification of tasks.....	39
5.1.1.3 Nature of tasks.....	40
5.1.2 Basic principles of Task-based Approach.....	43
5.1.3 Basic framework of Task-based Approach.....	47
5.2 Willis task-based teaching model.....	50
5.2.1 Pre-task cycle.....	53
5.2.2 Task cycle.....	57
5.2.3 Planning cycle.....	59
5.2.4 Post-task cycle.....	61
5.3 Questionnaire.....	62
5.3.1 Subjects.....	63
5.3.2 Analysis of statistics.....	63
 Chapter 6 Conclusion.....	 69
Works Cited.....	71
Appendix.....	76
Acknowledgements.....	78

目 录

第一章 引言.....	1
第二章 中国英语口语学习的现状.....	3
2.1 口语的重要性及其特征.....	3
2.1.1 大学英语口语教学目标及本质.....	3
2.1.2 英语口语的主要方面.....	4
2.2 中国大学生英语口语的学习现状.....	5
2.2.1 中国大学生英语口语的学习现状.....	5
2.2.2 阻止英语口语提高的因素.....	10
2.2.2.1 内部因素.....	10
2.2.2.2 外部因素.....	11
第三章 二语习得相关理论回顾.....	13
3.1 克拉申五个假设理论.....	13
3.1.1 学习—习得区分假设.....	14
3.1.2 自然顺序假设.....	15
3.1.3 监察假设.....	16
3.1.4 输入假设.....	16
3.1.5 情感过滤假设.....	19
3.2 英语口语中的石化现象.....	22
3.2.1 导致石化现象的原因.....	22
3.2.2 教学策略.....	24
第四章 英语口语的主要方面.....	26
4.1 流利性.....	26
4.1.1 焦虑.....	26
4.1.2 记忆系统.....	28

4.1.3 “练习”的作用.....	29
4.2 准确性.....	30
4.2.1 错误评估.....	31
4.2.2 错误处理.....	32
4.3 复杂性.....	33
4.3.1 语言迁移.....	33
4.3.2 交际策略.....	34
第五章 任务型教学法.....	36
5.1 理论背景.....	37
5.1.1 “任务”定义, 分类和本质.....	38
5.1.1.1 “任务”的定义.....	38
5.1.1.2 “任务”的分类.....	39
5.1.1.3 “任务”的本质.....	40
5.1.2 任务型教学法的基本原则.....	43
5.1.3 任务型教学法的基本框架.....	47
5.2 威利斯任务型教学模式.....	50
5.2.1 任务前阶段.....	53
5.2.2 任务阶段.....	57
5.2.3 计划阶段.....	59
5.2.4 任务后阶段.....	61
5.3 问卷调查.....	62
5.3.1 受试对象.....	63
5.3.2 数据分析.....	63
第六章 结论.....	69
参考文献.....	71
附录.....	76
致谢.....	78

Chapter 1 Introduction

It is observed that in traditional English class in China, teachers over-emphasize the mastery of grammatical rules and memorization of vocabulary, but neglect communicative functions of the language. Shu Dingfang and Zhuang Zhixiang (1996) in *Modern Foreign Language Teaching* make a survey of Chinese traditional English class and find out the similar phenomena.

With Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach emerging, however, the attention of English teaching in China is shifted from language competence to communicative competence gradually. The emphasis in CLT on the process of communication, rather than mastery of language forms, leads to different roles that teachers and students play from those in traditional second language classrooms.

Breen and Candlin (1980) describes that the role of student in CLT as negotiator--- between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning--- interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedure and activities which the group undertakes (Breen and Candlin 1980: 110). And the most important role of teacher is to facilitate the communication process among all participants in the classroom and guide learners to monitor output.

In the CLT oral English class, more often than not, there is no text, grammar rules are not presented, classroom arrangement is nonstandard, students are expected to interact primarily with each other rather than with the teacher, and correction of errors may be absent or infrequent. Some teachers over-emphasize the fluency of students' oral English and only focus on communicative purpose. They ignore the accuracy and complexity of students' oral English. Meanwhile, the majority of students adopt various communicative strategies (i.e. avoidance) to ensure successful communication. However the frequent use of communicative strategies and teachers' tolerant attitude towards errors lead to the fossilization of students' language competence during oral English learning.

Conversely the focus on fluency and comprehensibility in CLT may cause anxiety among teachers who are accustomed to regarding error correction and preparing students to take tests as their major instructional responsibilities. They over-correct

students' mistakes and errors when students speak English, and mainly care about the accuracy of students' oral English. Consequently when students produce the output, they are anxious of their errors and their confidence is reduced, which is disadvantageous for their oral English improvement.

Therefore it is necessary to find out an effective and comprehensive way to improve students' oral English. In oral English class, pre-task, during-task and post-task phases in task-based approach can activate both teachers and students to balance language meanings and forms so as to enable college students to improve oral fluency, oral accuracy and oral complexity in an effective way. From the perspective of theories in second language acquisition and cognitive psychology, task-based approach can maximize the probability that the three goals above are achieved.

Chapter 2 The Situation of Oral English Learning in China

With the development of economy and more and more international exchanges in China, English, particularly oral English plays an increasingly significant role in society. Consequently, oral English learning has received more attention than ever. Both adults in employment and students in schools show their enthusiasm and devote great efforts into oral English learning. However the effect is not satisfactory at all and it needs great improvement.

2.1 Importance of oral English and its characteristics

He Ziran (1997) points out that the traditional English teaching has been influenced by Structural Linguistics since 1960s. It over-emphasizes the forms of language and neglects the communicative function of language. Under its influence, in traditional English class in China, the majority of teachers saw English learning involving the mastery of grammatical rules and memorization of vocabulary, or regarded language as a process of habit formation: structural patterns were imitated and drilled until automation was formed.

As a result, with the development of reform and opening in China, when college students graduate and work in the society, most of them are not capable of communicating with foreigners in oral English. Therefore, the importance of communicative functions of English has become increasingly obvious. It is urgent and necessary for college students to improve their oral English in an effective and comprehensive way before they step into the society.

2.1.1 Objective and nature of oral English teaching in colleges

According to *College English Courses' Teaching Requirements* issued by Ministry of Education of China in July, 2004, the objective of college English teaching is to develop students' comprehensive English competence, especially in listening and speaking, which enables them to take effective use of English in spoken and written communication. Secondly, college English teaching should strengthen college students' ability of self-study and improve their comprehensive cultural quality in

order to adapt to the development of economy and demand for international communication.

Therefore, the objective of college English teaching is to enable students to achieve successful communication in spoken and written English. As for the nature of oral English teaching process, it is communication as well. Firstly, teaching is the process of communication between teachers and students and it is the interaction between them. That is, teaching means communication. Secondly, teaching is a kind of teacher-student communicative activities, whose aim is to develop students' English language competence and it is achieved through communication, so teaching is by communication. Lastly, teaching and learning are mutual development through communication. The development of students' language competence cannot be separated from teachers' knowledge of teaching methods. Meanwhile, the better knowledge of teaching methods cannot be separated from the development of students' language competence, either. So, teaching is to develop communication.

2.1.2 Main aspects of oral English

Skehan (1998) in *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning* introduces the latest theories of second language acquisition and cognitive psychology. Oral English teaching should attach importance to universality of teaching and individuality of learners. When learners practise speaking English, they should be instructed to pay attention to both meanings and forms of the language in order to achieve the fluency, accuracy and complexity of linguistic performance.

However, facts prove that in Communicative Language Teaching, learners' language competence is often fossilized. Why does communicative approach that attaches importance to successful communication do little to the progress of linguistic structure and linguistic forms in classroom English teaching? *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning* solves this problem. Skehan P. (1998) points out that we can completely feel the pressure of language information process during actual communicative environment, so we have to choose the strategy that can have a quick and effective language information process. We prefer to depend on the strategy that can save time, such as fillers, hesitations and rephrasings instead of exhausting analysis to comprehend language and organize output. These strategies can help

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